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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

## *The Old and New Testament Student*

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AMONG the topics pertaining to the Sunday school which in the editorial in the January issue were named for future discussion, none is of more fundamental importance, on none will there be sharper difference of opinion, than the matter of the curriculum. The issue is practically between two distinct conceptions of what the course of study in a Sunday school should be. Shall uniformity be the dominant idea of the Sunday-school curriculum, and shall all the school, and if possible all schools the world over, study the same lesson on the same day? Or shall the course of instruction be graded, as in all other schools today—graded, that is, not only in the treatment of the material, but also in the selection of the material to be treated?

THE advantages of uniformity are undoubtedly great. It secures unity in the school, enabling the teachers to coöperate in the study of the lesson, and giving the superintendent an opportunity to direct and stimulate the work of instruction throughout the school. It secures unity in the home, making it possible for the father or the mother to assist and guide in the study of the lesson at home by the whole family from youngest to oldest, and facilitating the association of family prayer with the study of the Bible in the Sunday school. It immensely facilitates the preparation and publication of helps on the part of religious papers and in the form of quarterlies, lesson papers, etc. It

ADVANTAGES OF  
UNIFORMITY

enlists on the side of Bible study in the Sunday school an immense capital of brains and money. It appeals powerfully to sentiment, and secures the help of that important ally. The superintendent and teacher in every city and hamlet in the land, the parent in every home, even the child himself, feels, or may feel, the stimulus and inspiration of the fact that the prayerful thought of the Christian world is turning with him to the portion of Scripture assigned for study today.

But the graded curriculum has its advantages too, and they are of the greatest importance from an educational point of view.

*ADVANTAGES OF  
A GRADED  
CURRICULUM* The selection of material, not on the principle of engaging the whole Christian world in the study of a given portion at the same time, but on that of giving each class or grade of scholars in each school the material best adapted to their age and stage of advancement, and of so arranging the course both in respect to material and method of study as to constitute an orderly and progressive course of study, is the only method which can make our Sunday schools in the best sense of the term educational institutions. This method adapts the material to the capacity of the scholar, avoiding the absurdity of setting children of six years old to studying the pastoral epistles or the book of Revelation. It secures the study of the different portions of the Bible in the best order, taking into account both the relation of the different parts of the Bible to one another and the varying needs and capacities of children of different ages. It will result in giving to each pupil who completes the course a connected and related knowledge of the whole Bible and of its teaching taken as a whole, instead of the distorted and disconnected view which the system of uniformity too often gives.

Which system shall we choose; or rather, toward which shall we work? For we scarcely possess the literature today that makes a choice possible at once. The answer will depend in the end upon which of two conceptions we hold of the Bible, and of the purpose of the Sunday school. On the one side, if the

Bible is alike in all its parts, and equally valuable in them all, being useful simply for the moral and religious precepts or theological propositions which can be directly culled from it, or gained by a species of allegorical interpretation, then the advantages of the system of uniformity will probably outweigh in our minds those of a graded educational curriculum. But if the Bible is the history of a progressive revelation, and if, for this reason, it yields its best results alike intellectually and morally when it is studied with due reference to the relation of part to part, and to the unfolding of the great divine plan and revelation that runs through it, then we shall give our suffrages to the graded curriculum in preference to the system of uniformity. In saying this it is by no means implied that the whole curriculum should be dominated by the aim to teach history in the chronological order. The best starting point for the study of history is not necessarily its earliest event. Nor does an education necessarily begin with the study of history. But a graded curriculum will make provision both for whatever study of the Bible ought to precede, for the younger children, a treatment of it from a historical point of view, and for due recognition in the later stages of the curriculum of the historical character of the book, and the progressive character of the revelation made in it.

If again we conceive of Sunday-school teaching as essentially preaching, that is, primarily intended for the purpose of persuading to action, rather than of instructing, especially if we carry this so far as to hold that the more the element of exhortation predominates over that of the acquisition of knowledge, the more truly the Sunday school realizes the ideal, then we shall see little advantage in a graded curriculum, and the real advantages of uniformity will lead us to decide for the system of which that is the dominating thought. But if, on the other hand, we believe that the Sunday school is an educational institution, in which the moral and spiritual end is supreme, but the agency employed is distinctly educational; if we hold that

*CHOICE AS  
AFFECTED BY  
OUR CONCEPTION  
OF THE BIBLE*

*AS AFFECTED  
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the church ought to have one service in which the great moral and religious end of the church itself shall be sought distinctly through biblical instruction, and that the Sunday school shall be that service, then we shall decide that in it the best educational methods ought to be employed, and that the Sunday school ought to have a curriculum, not merely lessons used at the same time by all the pupils from the child to the adult.

Which side of this question the church will ultimately take we have no doubt whatever. The uniform system has accomplished great results for the Sunday school. But for this very reason it will be the stepping-stone to something better. It is not true that the Bible is of homogeneous character throughout, so that all parts of it are equally adapted to the instruction of children of every age, and that it is of no consequence at which end the child begins to learn it. Let it be granted that almost any portion of Scripture may be made to suggest something that will be useful to a pupil of any age; yet the attempt to use certain portions of Scripture for the instruction of the younger children, for example, inevitably results either in the maltreatment of the Scripture or the confusion of the child, and usually in both; while the limitation of the selection to those portions which can be used by the whole school means such a curtailing of the course of study as inevitably drives the older scholars out of the school. What would be said of the argument that, because it is possible to teach something about geometry to any pupil from five years old up to twenty, therefore geometry ought to be made in a given year or term the subject of study from the top to the bottom of our public-school system? And yet almost every argument that can be urged for uniform lessons in the Sunday school might be urged for such a course in the public schools. The truth is that the Sunday school is lagging far behind the public school in educational method, and stands today almost on the level of the old ungraded district school. If the study of the Bible is more vitally important than the study of mathematics; if religious culture is more necessary than secular, then the Sunday

*ON WHICH SIDE  
THE DECISION  
WILL BE*

school ought to be employing the best educational methods, not lagging in the rear of educational advance. Is it worth while to teach the Bible as well as we teach arithmetic? Uniformity has its advantages, but they may be purchased at too high a price.

But if these contentions are just, they involve two conclusions of a practical character. If the Sunday school ought to seek the high end which belongs to it in common with every other agency of the church, the creation and development of Christian character, by distinctly educational means, then to someone there belongs the duty of framing an intelligently constructed curriculum for the study of the Bible in the Sunday school, and to someone that of preparing suitable literature for the study and teaching of it in accordance with such a curriculum. If no one is wise enough to do this today, if we do not even know what the curriculum ought to be, then we must begin still further back and take up the study of the problem and the collection of the data which will enable us to construct at least a provisional curriculum. Of that great capital of money and brains and spiritual zeal which is now going into the preparation of a literature which, however able and scholarly and devout, is based on an antiquated educational method, is there not some part that can be devoted to the elevation of Sunday-school instruction, to bringing it up at least to the level of our none too perfect public-school system?

But there is another duty nearer at hand and one which belongs to a much larger number of persons. Though it is true that there is not yet available any system of lessons or text-books which is adjusted to an intelligent curriculum, it is also true that there are the beginnings of such a literature, and that from the material now in print a selection might be made which would provisionally serve the purposes of a graded school. We cannot spring at once into a perfectly organized curriculum. We must reach it step by step, and by the coöperation of the Sunday schools

with those who are preparing and publishing the literature. Has not the time come when some of our Sunday schools at least can wisely break with the system of uniformity, and by the employment of a selected literature, accompanied by intelligent classification of pupils, begin to work toward a rational curriculum? Such a step, if discreetly taken, would both improve at once the instruction in the school that adopted it, and encourage on the part of those engaged in the preparation of Sunday-school text-books more rapid forward movement. Is not this the duty of the hour in Sunday-school work?